

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0918

September 5, 2019

Colonel Andrew Kelly
Jacksonville District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Dear Colonel Kelly:

I first want to thank you for your efforts during this year's dry season, utilizing the flexibility afforded to you under law, to manage the water level in Lake Okeechobee in a more responsible manner. The benefits of this strategy became extremely clear in the days before the anticipated landfall of Hurricane Dorian. Moreover, I am writing to request that you continue to exhaust all possible flood control options prior to making the decision to discharge water from Lake Okeechobee into the C-44 Canal.

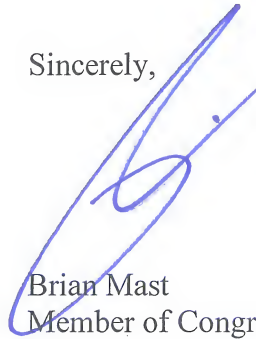
As a result of your decision to not be boxed in by a failed operational status quo this winter, the communities east and west of Lake Okeechobee benefitted immensely this summer and in the lead up to Hurricane Dorian. No harmful discharges were necessary this summer, including in the days leading up to Hurricane Dorian, because of the lower lake levels entering wet season. This has spared our communities from toxic algal blooms and the harmful influx of fresh water.

Also importantly, the improved operations have provided additional safety to the communities surrounding Lake Okeechobee. As you may recall, there were massive evacuations in the days leading up to Hurricane Irma, including Belle Glade, Canal Point, Clewiston, Lake Harbor, Moore Haven, Pahokee and South Bay. Evacuations were unnecessary leading up to Hurricane Dorian because of improved dry season operations of the Lake, coupled with improvements that have been made to the stability of the Herbert Hoover Dike. The reduced risk on the stability of the Dike that results from improved dry season management has the potential to be a truly life-saving improvement.

Moving forward, I urge you to continue operating Lake Okeechobee in a manner that increases safety for the communities around the lake, while also protecting Florida's public health. To that end, prior to the storm, the Army Corps predicted that Dorian would bring approximately three and a half feet of water to Lake Okeechobee, necessitating discharges to mitigate risks related to future storms. As you know, these discharges would be incredibly damaging to our community. Now, it is my understanding that the projection for water inflows has been reduced to one foot over the next month. Therefore, the discharges to the east provide only minimal flood control benefit compared to the massive public health risks. I am confident that, working in partnership with the South Florida Water Management District, this capacity can be found elsewhere in the system.

Therefore, I am writing to request that, given the lowered projection for water inflows, you exhaust all possible flood control options before discharging water east out of Lake Okeechobee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Brian Mast", written over the printed name.

Brian Mast
Member of Congress